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Philosophy, Psychology, and the Gods
in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*

Résumé :

Le rapport entre les tragédies de Sénèque et la philosophie est un sujet canonique de recherche. Ici nous abordons ce lien à travers l'étude de l'*Hercules Furens*, qui suscite deux questions importantes. D'abord, quelle est la nature de la santé mentale, et de quelle manière est-elle reliée aux exploits, crimes, délires, et besoins d'expiation d'Hercule? Deuxièmement, quels sont les liens entre la santé mentale et les Dieux, au regard notamment de l'hostilité de Juno ? Dans la première partie de cet article une réponse sera donnée du point de vue stoïcien. Dans cette perspective, la démence du héros doit être comprise comme le résultat de jugements erronés, qui sont au coeur de son crime, sa souffrance, et son aliénation à Jupiter. Cette explication est cependant incomplète, puisqu'elle n'éclaire ni le délire d'Hercule ni la haine de la déesse. Dans la deuxième partie de cet article, une réponse sera par conséquent donnée du point de vue d'une philosophie contemporaine. Bernard Stiegler propose que les relations entre les pensées et les sentiments soient plus complexes que les stoïciens ne le croient, surtout en ce qui concerne le pouvoir de « faire attention »; il suppose que l'« esprit » qui pense et ressent soit étendu à l'environnement; et il intègre à ce système « spirituel » des entités plus ambiguës que le Dieu stoïcien, bien qu'il ne les examine pas suffisamment en détail. Sa philosophie nous permet donc d'expliquer le délire, le crime, et le besoin d'expiation comme des éléments d'un écosystème plus large, qui incluent non seulement les pensées et les passions, mais également les relations personnelles, les mains et les armes, les idéaux et les Dieux. Ainsi nous pouvons clarifier à la fois le rapport de Juno au délire du héros et la spiritualité invoquée par Stiegler. En conclusion, le rapport entre la tragédie de Sénèque et la philosophie est dynamique et réflexif : l'*Hercules Furens* porte à la scène une vision qui peut s'expliquer partiellement par le stoïcisme ou la philosophie de Bernard Stiegler ; en même temps, elle révèle les limites de ces systèmes doctrinaux.

The relation of Seneca's tragedies to his straightforwardly philosophical prose is a canonical one for scholarship¹, even if it is more often noted as a problem than explored in detail. In this article, I will approach this relation via *Hercules Furens*, which sets in relief two important issues.

¹ Particularly thought-provoking, from a range of methodologies: C. GILL, Seneca on Selfhood: Integration and Disintegration, *Seneca and the Self*, S. BARTSCH and D. WRAY (eds.), Cambridge, 2009, 65-83; T. G. ROSENMEYER, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology*, Berkeley, University of California, 1989; V. LAURAND, La parrhêsia tragique: l'exemple d'un échec, *Itaca: Quaderns Catalans de Cultura Clàssica*, 28-29, 2012-2013, 147-65; C. A. J. LITTLEWOOD, 2004, *Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy*, Oxford, esp. 15-102.

The first concerns Hercules' delirium. We recall that in the prologue, the goddess Juno resolves to destroy Hercules by driving him mad. The play opens with Hercules away in the underworld, Thebes ruled tyrannically by Lycus, and Hercules' wife first wooed and then threatened by the tyrant; after he returns, learns what is happening, and kills Lycus, Hercules is overcome by a fit of madness and murders his wife and children. When he recovers lucidity, he begs his father and Theseus (who has meanwhile arrived) to give him his weapons, only gradually coming to accept that enduring his condition is a more virtuous act than killing himself.

This plot dramatizes two conditions that coalesce in the Stoic formulation of the end, namely sanity and virtue. What does it mean to be of healthy mind, and when – if ever – is Hercules in that condition? What is the nature of virtue, and how does it relate to Hercules' exploits, delirium, crime, and urge for expiation? The Stoic answers to all these questions revolve around understanding the reason things happen, which is god as “ruler and guardian of the universe, master and craftsman of this work; ... fate, on which all things depend, the cause of causes; ... providence, ... by whose planning this world is taken care of, so that it flows freely and unfolds its activities” (Sen. *NQ* 2.45.1-2)². To what extent, I will ask, does *Hercules*' plot challenge and enrich the Stoics' psychology of health and virtue and its theological underpinning?

The second issue dovetails with the first, insofar as Hercules' struggle toward sanity and virtue is simultaneously a quest to become divine. The problem of divinization is strikingly prominent in the tragedy. To recall only a few highlights, Juno relates that Hercules “is spoken of as a god all over the world” (39-40) and worries that “he's seeking a path to the gods above” (74; cf. 89-90, 276-7, 437, 569);

² All translations from Greek or Latin are my own.

Amphitryon corrects his prayer to “the governor and father of the heavenly ones” by asking, “Why am I calling in vain on the gods? Wherever you are, my son, hear me!” (516-19); and Hercules, raving that “my father promises the stars,” threatens to lead a rebellion against “my father’s faithless kingdom” (966).

While this might appear to be a particularly mythical problem, the aspiration to become godlike is very important to ancient Stoicism as well. Seneca writes,

Just as the body’s posture is erect and looks toward heaven, so the mind, which extends as far as it wishes, has been naturally formed to want things equal to the gods. If it uses its own powers and expands to its own dimensions, then by its proper road it strives for the highest things. Going to heaven would be an enormous labor; the mind goes *back* there. (*Ep. Mor.* 92.30; cf. 9.16, 31.11, 41.3-5, 76.23, 85.20, 87.19-21, 93.8, *Dial.* 1.1.5; etc.³)

Wanting things “equal to the gods” (*paria dis*) means both wanting divine wellbeing and wanting what god wants – namely what providence actually causes to happen. Despite Seneca’s reassurance that this ascension should not be an “enormous labor” (*magnus labor*), the philosophical “return” to divinity remains a Herculean task: by unspoken convention, no Stoic ever claims to have attained their declared end. Thus Hercules’ tragic yearning for heaven finds a significant analogy in the unfulfillable Stoic project of becoming wise⁴.

However, we must immediately temper this analogy by noting that the furious hostility of *Hercules’* Juno is hard to reconcile with the benevolence of Stoic god. Scholars have explored how Seneca’s Hercules falls under the literary-historical shadow of Virgil’s Aeneas, who brings with him the wrath of Juno as the burden of

³ For a fuller discussion, see J. P. COMELLA, *Une piété de la raison: Philosophie et religion dans le stoïcisme impérial. Des Lettres à Lucilius de Sénèque aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*, Turnhout, Brepols, 89-186.

⁴ Compare Jean-Noël MICHAUD, *L’Hercules Furens: De la folie dans la tragédie à la tragédie, spectacle de la folie, Vita Latina* 136, 1994, 12-13, 16-18; G. DELEUZE, *Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. C. V. Boundas, London, Bloomsbury, 149-50.

Roman civilization⁵. They have also argued that Seneca's tragic theology reflects a characteristically Neronian pessimism⁶. Yet neither of these insights makes Juno any more compatible with Stoicism. Perhaps it is for this reason that Seneca's tragedies are missing from the index to Jordi Comella's massive study of imperial Stoic religion⁷, and in general are still neglected by students of Stoicism. I suggest that this is a missed opportunity; the problems of divine agency and human ritual in *Hercules* are valuable supplements for Stoic theology. Not only that, but thinking through them provides a new perspective on the malaise of Seneca's tragic universe – and, by implication, Nero's Rome. Finally, inasmuch as god plays a central role in Seneca's ethics, this tragedy also suggests lessons about Stoic and neo-Stoic arts of therapy and self-cultivation.

We should recall that Seneca's primary source text, Euripides' *Herakles*, vividly highlights the relationship of human feelings, thoughts, and actions with inhuman forces. Brooke Holmes has illuminated how multiple explanatory narratives converge on the enigma of Herakles' "symptom" as a bodily and mental event: the unseen, impersonal, inhuman powers of the bodily interior overlap with the unseen, personified, divine powers of Hera and Lussa. Herakles' final "labor" in Euripides' play is to resist simplifying narratives, accept the interplay of personal and impersonal forces in his actions, and undertake the painful task of recuperating their

⁵ Of course, Ovid's Juno also influences Seneca. See C. V. TRINACTY, *Senecan Tragedy and the Reception of Augustan Poetry*, New York, Oxford USA, 2014, 130-37; E. WILSON, *Mocked with Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, 2004, 99-100; J. G. FITCH, *Seneca's Hercules Furens*, Ithaca, Cornell, passim.

⁶ G. BRADEN, *The Rhetoric and Psychology of Power in the Dramas of Seneca*, *Arion*, 9.1, 1970, 5-41; C. SEGAL, *Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy*, *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Seneca*, J. FITCH (ed.), Oxford, 136-45; WILSON, *op. cit.*, 88-112; LITTLEWOOD, *loc. cit.*

⁷ *Op. cit.*

meaningfulness.⁸ Though interpreters of Seneca have recognized the entanglement of Hercules' celestial aspirations with Juno's infernal malignity⁹, surprisingly little effort has been made to reflect on how the tragedy's portrayal of impersonal powers could complicate – arguably for the better – Stoic positions around cognition, emotion, or moral responsibility¹⁰.

In this article, I will borrow ideas from several modern theorists in order to suggest how Seneca's delirium, conflict with an angry god, and struggle to find meaning in his crime can be made to supplement Stoic thinking. My primary point of reference will be the works of Bernard Stiegler, whose philosophy illuminates the entanglement of psychology with ethics, sociology, technics, and spirituality. This provides an important counterpoint to the emphasis on individual cognition in ancient Stoicism cognitive-behavioral neo-Stoicism¹¹. I wish to make explicit that I by no means impute to Seneca the lessons articulated here. Part of the value of good fiction is that its meanings exceed the author's intentions. The Stieglerian lens reveals saliences and patterns that Seneca could not have seen in the same way. Seneca's text, in turn, gives new significance to Stiegler's philosophy, especially his pervasive but nebulous "spirituality"¹².

I. A Traditional Stoic Reading

⁸ Euripides' Heracles in the Flesh, *Classical Antiquity*, 27.2, 2008, 231-81.

⁹ Esp. LITTLEWOOD, *op. cit.*, 107-19.

¹⁰ An exception is ROSENMEYER, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Regarding the latter, see D. J. ROBERTSON, The Stoic Influence on Modern Psychotherapy, *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, J. SELLARS (ed.), London, Routledge, 374-88.

¹² In this I continue the project foreshadowed in From Metaphysics to Ethics (with Bernard Stiegler, Heraclitus, and Aristotle), *Contemporary Encounters with Ancient Metaphysics*, D. GREENSTINE and R. JOHNSON (eds.), Edinburgh, 2017, 323-28.

It would be obtuse to attempt to reduce *Hercules* to “didactic Stoicism”¹³.

Problems around manly virtue, fury, affection, compassion, and proximity to gods are prominent in the Greek and Roman dramatic and epic traditions. On the other hand, philosophical reflection on the relation of Hercules’ exploits to true virtue and godlikeness goes back at least to Antisthenes in the early fourth century BCE¹⁴. So it is worth noting how elements of Seneca’s tragedy lend themselves to a Stoic reading. Such a reading will revolve around three overlapping questions: What is good? What is virtue? and what does Jupiter want from Hercules?

I will start with the question of the good. Although the word “good” (*bonus*) appears only three times in *Hercules* (252, 525, 1259), the last of these appearances is interpretively important. It occurs after Hercules’ delirium has passed:

Now I’ve lost all good things together (*cuncta iam amisi bona*):
my mind, my arms, my reputation, my wife, my children, my hands
and even my madness. No one can heal
a tainted soul. Death must sanitize this crime. (1259-62)

Most of the things Hercules mentions in this passage are neither intrinsically good nor bad, if judged by Stoic doctrine. His reputation, possessions, and even the lives of his loved ones are technically “indifferent”¹⁵. What matters is how he handles these indifferents, which is the terrain of virtue¹⁶. Virtue is the knowledge or “right

¹³ FITCH, *op. cit.*, 30-31, 40-44. In fact the only philosophically didactic reading of *Heracles* of which I know betrays little grasp of Stoic theory: C. ZINTZEN, *Alte virtus animosa cadit: Gedanken zur Darstellung des Tragischen in Senecas Hercules Furens, Senecas Tragödien*, E. LEFÈVRE (ed.), Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972, 149-209. A. L. MOTTO and J. R. CLARK only glance at Stoic doctrine in *Maxima Virtus in Seneca’s Hercules Furens*, *Classical Philology*, 76.2, 1981, 101-17.

¹⁴ A. BRANCACCI, *The Socratic Profile of Antisthenes’ Ethics, From The Socratics to the Socratic Schools*, U. ZILIOLI (ed.), London, Routledge, pp. 52-4.

¹⁵ *Ep. Mor.* 82.9-15; LONG and SEDLEY, *op. cit.*, §58.

¹⁶ See esp. *Ep. Mor.* 66, 71, 74, 76, 85, 120. Technically, the Stoic position is that “the good is benefit or not other than benefit,” which encompasses not only states of virtue, but also the virtuous states of true friends as well virtuous activities and

reason¹⁷ that governs the handling of indifferents. Therefore a Stoic reading will maintain that the real crux of Hercules' misery, as well as the signpost to any recovery, lies in his concern for his "mind" (*mentem*) and "soul" (*animus*). The Stoics also define virtue as "the mind disposed in a certain way."¹⁸ Hercules has not in fact "lost" such a disposition; he never had it to begin with. Certainly he needs mental "healing" (*mederi*) and "sanitizing" (*sanandum est*), but not by suicide; the answer is progress toward virtue by the application of reason and appropriation of knowledge.

This brings us to the second topic in my Stoic reading, which is the nature of virtue. Although Hercules never explicitly addresses this issue, the drama as a whole ponders the relation of Hercules' mind and actions to virtue. The baseline for this pondering is the heroic paradigm, which focuses on the bodily and mental vigor associated with manliness (*virtus < vir*)¹⁹, actions accomplished with that vigor, and honor won by those actions. For example, Amphtryon asks Theseus to "unfold the sequence of [Hercules'] virtues" (*pande virtutum ordinem*, 647) – in other words, to narrate his deeds of bravery and strength. When Hercules believes some unknown enemy is responsible for his family's murder, he exclaims, "arise, virtue (*exsurge, virtus*)! What new enemy has my father begotten for me?" (1157-8) Here "virtue" designates the passion and strength necessary for violent action. Finally, after he realizes that he himself is the murderer, Hercules calls on his father to respect "the spoiled beauty of my virtue" (*violatum decus virtutis*) and permit him to kill himself.

eupatheiai (A. A. LONG and D. N. SEDLEY, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge, 1987, §60G-M).

¹⁷ *Nihil enim aliud est virtus quam recta ratio*, *Ep. Mor.* 66.32. Cf. *Ep. Mor.* 31.8, 45.28; LONG and SEDLEY, *op. cit.*, §61D, H.

¹⁸ *Sen. Ep. Mor.* 113.1-25.

¹⁹ This complex goes back to Achilles, as M. CLARKE concisely explains in *Manhood and Heroism*, *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, R. FOWLER (ed.), Cambridge, 2004, pp. 74-90.

Here “virtue” connotes the honor that rewards brave, strong, violent deeds, especially when they are undertaken on behalf of the community.

From a Stoic perspective, this heroic paradigm has both serious faults and seeds of truth. The most important fault lies in the proximity of manly virtue to passions like “anger” (*ira*) and “fury” (*furor*). The Stoics believe that passions are hasty, incorrect, or unstable judgments about what is good or bad and how it is appropriate to react, which are accompanied by characteristic affects. Moreover, as a situation develops, one passionate judgment triggers another. The intensity of the affects and the entanglement of related judgments make passions resistant to correction²⁰. For example, anger is a class of desire, specifically “a desire to punish someone by whom you believe yourself to have been injured” (Lact. *De Ira Dei* 17.13); while “desire” is a hasty, incorrect, or unstable “belief about a future good, that it would be beneficial to have it available now” (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.14). Such a belief is accompanied by a powerful feeling of expansion, distension, or anticipation (*ibid.*, 4.15²¹), which makes critical reflection practically impossible. Thus the Stoics say the angry person is “temporarily insane” (Sen. *De Ira* 1.2). Moreover, they say that anyone prone to anger is also insane, even if he appears calm most of the time. Cicero provides a helpful illustration:

The Stoics say all fools are insane just as all swamps stink.
“Not always,” you object.
Stir one up, and you’ll smell it.
In the same way, an irascible person isn’t always angry. But provoke him, and you’ll see him become furious. (*ibid.* 4.54)

This analysis can illuminate many details in *Hercules*²². Let us hypothesize that Hercules has a propensity toward anger before he enters the play’s action, just as

²⁰ M. GRAVER’s analysis is unsurpassed: *Stoicism and Emotion*, Chicago, 2007.

²¹ Cf. LONG and SEDLEY, *op. cit.*, §65B-D.

²² My reading here is anticipated in some details by Fitch, *op. cit.*, 24-40.

an undisturbed swamp contains noxious vapors. We will then be unsurprised that he becomes angry as soon as he arrives, like a swamp stinks when stirred up. When he learns about Lycus' tyranny, he declares, "Let the victim²³ be slaughtered, and let my virtue bear this stain! ... I'm carried off to drink my enemy's blood" (634-6)! Since he speaks of a "stain" (*notam*), Hercules obviously grasps that being "carried off" or "carried away" (*feror*) in pursuit of vengeance compromises his own virtue. The implicit role of anger here requires elucidation: we must recall that anger's object is always vengeance, and that it always "gets carried away" – in other words, its judgments become resistant to correction. After Hercules recovers from delirium, the role of anger becomes explicit. "Let everyone feel my anger!" he exclaims. "Anyone who conceals my enemy is my enemy" (1167-8)! Soon he realizes that he himself is the culprit, and cries out for punishment (1201-18). "His heart, still filled with stormy confusion, has not yet abandoned its anger," Amphytrion comments, "and like all furious people, he rages against himself" (1219-21). Thus the class of his enemies first expands to encompass the entire universe, then shrinks to a self-annihilating point. If we accept the Stoic view that anger makes claims about the world, we can posit a continuum between this "stormy confusion" (*tumultu attonito*, 1219) and his earlier delirium (988-1019). The former implicitly accuses everyone of wronging him, and opines it would be good to take his own life; the latter explicitly mistakes his wife for Juno and his children for Lycus', and opines it would be good to kill them. In both cases his anger makes false claims about reality, and in this sense he is "mad."

The play's underworld imagery can also be read as a reflection of Hercules' impassioned madness. Seneca has Theseus describe at great length the darkness, frigidity, stillness, squalor, and gaping voids of Hades (662-759). In a Stoic vein, we

²³ Reading *hostia* for the manuscripts' *hostis*, with Fitch, *op. cit.*, 285-6.

might interpret this as a world emptied of the divine “breath” that gives vitality and identity to beings and events²⁴. This gives new significance to the fact that Hercules, like Orpheus and Aeneas, never entirely escapes Hades²⁵. “You think you’ve escaped from Styx and the ghosts of the dead, savage one?” Juno asks. “I’ll show you Hell right here” (90-91). Everywhere is hellish for Hercules, because he is alienated from the being and meaning of things²⁶. This is another face of his insanity.

Gradually Theseus and Amphitryon persuade him to give up his rage, and thus genuinely to begin extracting himself from hell. In the process, Theseus hints at a reconceptualization of virtue: “Now you must exhibit truly great virtue: forbid Hercules to be angry” (1276-7). On a Stoic reading, the injunction here is not to *govern* his manly spirits, even though Hercules himself understands it that way. He seems still to associate “virtue” with passionate commitments to action and honor. “Yield, virtue,” he tells himself, “and endure your father’s command [to go on living]” (1315). But Hercules’ understanding is wrong: his task is a much more thorough transformation, in which correct reasoning and courage will *replace* volatile indignation and vengefulness (cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 4.48-53).

The heroic paradigm is not all bad: imperial Stoics like Epictetus and Seneca also see presentiments of truth in it. Consider the opening choral ode (125-201), which Seneca has adapted from Euripides’ tragedy *Phaethon*²⁷. On the one hand, Phaethon’s story foreshadows Hercules’ own disaster. “Your heart is too brave,

²⁴ Seneca rhapsodizes about “breath” throughout *NQ* 2.4-11. For an overview of relevant physical and theological doctrines, see LONG and SEDLEY, *op. cit.*, §45-7.

²⁵ Orpheus: 561-92, with FITCH, *op. cit.*, 253; Aeneas: WILSON, *op. cit.*, 99-100.

²⁶ Cf. MICHAUD, *op. cit.*, 15-6. On the impassioned misery that accompanies folly in Senecan prose, see K. LAMPE, Seneca’s Nausea: ‘Existential’ Experiences and Julio-Claudian Literature, *Helios*, 2008, 67-87.

²⁷ Lines 63-100 in *Fragments: Oedipus-Chrysippus. Other Fragments*, C. COLLARD, M. CROPP (eds. and trans.), Cambridge, Harvard, 2009. The convergences are tabulated by FITCH, *op. cit.*, 158-60. Seneca undoubtedly has in mind Ovid, *Met.* 1.750-2.416, as well; cf. n.5 above.

Alcides,” the chorus sings, “when you rush to visit the lugubrious dead. ... Spirited virtue has a long way to fall” (*alte virtus animosa cadit*, 186-201). On the other hand, in his prose works Seneca is entirely capable of praising Phaethon’s lofty ambitions (*Prov.* 5.9-11), and more than once he appropriates Apollo’s words to Ascanius from Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “This is the pathway to the stars!” (*Aen.* 641; *Sen. Ep. Mor.* 48.11, 73.15) Both Seneca and Epictetus present Stoicism as an athletic-cum-military ordeal²⁸. Megara’s words resonate with this heroic vision of Stoicism when she claims that “Virtue involves taming what everyone fears” and “it’s no easy path from the earth to the stars” (435-7). So too Hercules’ prayer for “Fortune to be vanquished by my hand” tropes wisdom as victory over an enemy (1271-2). But Hercules fails to understand what this means in practice, which is that “vanquishing Fortune” means shifting his priorities from indifferents to the way they are used, prominently including their role in personal relationships²⁹. Hercules’ friendly relationship with Theseus and filial one with Amphtryon should determine the way he treats things like pleasure and pain, health, wealth, and life itself. In this respect the play’s ending, where Hercules preserves his life for his father’s sake, marks a hopeful new departure.

We have seen how a Stoic approach to the good in *Hercules* leads naturally to a critical analysis of his conception of virtue, and how this analysis illuminates the nature of his insanity. This brings me to the last part of this section, which concerns the will of Jupiter. Let us first observe that misunderstandings of divine thought and intention are yet another factor in Hercules’ anger. Both Juno and Hercules claim that

²⁸ On Hercules and Phaethon, see LITTLEWOOD, *op. cit.*, 107-27. On life as a providential ordeal, see A. A. LONG, *Epictetus: a Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*, Oxford, 2002, 195-6; J. SELLARS, Indifference and Affirmation: Michel Foucault on Stoic Fate and Providence, *French and Italian Stoicisms*, K. LAMPE and J. SCHOLTZ (ed.), London, Bloomsbury, forthcoming.

²⁹ Cf. nn. 15-7 with T. BRENNAN, *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, & Fate*, Oxford, 2005, 119-230.

Jupiter has “promised the stars” to Hercules (23, 959). But no one in the play understands how Jupiter is honoring this promise. That is why Amphytrion complains to “Olympus’ governor and the universe’s arbiter” about Hercules’ hard life and the corruption of the world (205-74), and ultimately abandons his prayer to “the governor and father of the heavenly ones” (516-19). In other words, Amphytrion loses confidence that he can understand and count on Jupiter’s will. It also helps to explain why Hercules, in his delirium, turns against Jupiter: he threatens to pursue Juno “even if you flee to the concealment of the Thunderer’s bosom” (1010) and “freeing Saturn from his chains, to release my grandfather against the helpless kingdom of my faithless father” (965-7). This is an expression of anger: Hercules believes Jupiter has wronged him, and wants to punish him. It is also a form of insanity, because Hercules’s belief is entirely wrong, and is carrying him away from reality.

Let me conclude by noting that Hercules’ alienation from Jupiter is tightly connected to his misunderstanding of virtue. Here we must remember that a common description of the Stoic project is “to want what god wants” (Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 74.20, *NQ* 3.pref.12). As we saw earlier, whatever happens is what god wants: god is the reason things are the way they are and events happen the way they happen. But divine reason in this sense usually escapes human cognition; the more accessible pathway to alignment with god’s will is to want wisdom and virtue³⁰. All human minds contain “divine seeds” of virtue, and if we strive to develop them, the gods “open the doors and lend us a hand as we ascend” (*Ep. Mor.* 73.15-6). If Jupiter fails to lend Hercules his hand, that is because he is on the wrong path. Less metaphorically, he does not understand what is good or bad, and therefore is not on the path to goodness, which is also the path to divine happiness.

³⁰ See the magisterial treatment of these themes in V. GOLDSCHMIDT, *Le système stoïcien et l’idée de temps*, Paris, Vrin, 1953, esp. 77-124.

IIa. A Non-Traditional Reading

The traditional Stoic reading I have just offered sheds substantial light on the questions I raised in the introduction. We can now explain how Hercules' incorrect beliefs about virtue, elevation to divinity, and the will of Jupiter play a causal role in his insanity. In this respect a Stoic would say that Hercules bears moral responsibility for his madness, inasmuch as it is caused by his mental assent to incorrect impressions³¹.

However, the phrase "inasmuch as" conceals remaining uncertainty. How many causes cooperate in Hercules' madness? Note that we are still far from making sense of the cause foregrounded by the dramatic action, namely the hostility of Juno. We could postulate that she exists only in Hercules' furious mind. But that is not how she is presented, so we should try to avoid that deflationary reading. Our interpretation also fails to explain why Hercules slips into outright delirium at 939:

"But what's this? Darkness has obscured high noon! ... Look! My first labor, the lion, covers half the sky with his brilliance, boiling with anger, readying his bite! Any moment he'll seize one of the stars!" (939-47)

By way of foreshadowing, let me suggest that it is not coincidental that Hercules has just finished two prayers and a sacrificial ritual, the correctness of which Amphytrion questions. At issue here are linguistic and practical relations to spiritual powers. Moreover, it is significant that among Amphytrion's concerns is the pollution of Hercules' hands: "Son, your hands are dripping with the blood of your enemies' murder. First purify them" (918-9). The relationship between the hands' activity and the subject's agency is more complex than we often assume. Finally, it is worth reflecting on how Hercules' delirious rage turns soon from his "right hand" (*dextra*) to his "slender arrows" (*leves sagittas*) and "Herculean weapons" (*tela Herculeae*, 989-

³¹ BRENNAN, *loc. cit.*, pp. 52-61, 251-68.

91). Under their various names (*arma, tela, clava, stipes, robora, arcus, pharetra, sagittae, harundo, spiculum*), Hercules' weapons receive extraordinary emphasis in this play's final act³²; even in his sleep, "he seeks his club's mass with his empty right hand, tossing his arms in vain activity" (1086-7).

In the following subsections, I will adapt Bernard Stiegler's theories in order to explain how hands, objects, and gods constitute a network across which impersonal powers circulate. These are not merely external stimuli, from which the mind, as a self-contained agency of thinking and feeling, can always in principle take its distance. Rather, they are integral parts of our thinking and feeling systems.

Ib. Hands, Tools, and Spirits

Bernard Stiegler's work extends into many areas, but revolves around "technics," which encompasses skills of doing and making, their instrumental materials, and the psychological and sociopolitical structures and procedures that make them possible. Given my interest in Hercules' psychology and its relation to the gods, I wish to isolate just three aspects of Stieglerian technics³³.

³² Seneca obviously takes inspiration from Eur. *Her.* 1377-85, but gives the theme an entirely new role.

³³ Stiegler repeats and elaborates his positions endlessly, but nowhere lays out his system patiently and clearly. My selective adaptation is based on *Acting Out* [AO], trans. D. BARISON, Daniel ROSS, and Patrick CROGAN, Stanford, 2009; *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies: Disbelief and Discredit, Vol. 1* [DID], trans. by D. ROSS and S. Arnold, Cambridge, Polity, 2011; *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism* [LSC], D. COLLINS (trans.), Cambridge, Polity, 2014; *Relational Ecology and the Digital Pharmakon* [RE], *Cultural Machine*, 13, 2012, 1-19; *Technics and Time, 1. The Fault of Epimetheus* [TT], R. BEARDSWORTH, G. COLLINS (trans.), Stanford, 1998; *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* [TCY], trans. S. BARKER, Stanford, 2010; *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* [WML], trans. D. ROSS, Cambridge, Polity, 2013.

First, Stiegler posits a more complex relation between feelings and thoughts than Stoicism. We have seen that Stoics think of sanity in terms of thoughts³⁴: virtue is knowledge about how to handle preferred and dispreferred indifferents, with due cognizance of one's own constitution, relationships, and roles. In concrete situations, this know-how is actualized as judgments. Feelings enter as a concomitant of judgments about value. For example, passions begin with incorrect judgments about how possessions or reputation have value; feelings follow and aggravate these judgments. By contrast, for Stiegler thinking and knowing are always already bound up with moods and conditions of psychological tension³⁵. For instance, it is only insofar as we *care about* an ideal like justice that we *pay attention* to discovering and applying it in any concrete situation. The capacity to pay attention and take care is acquired simultaneously with ideals themselves in relationships, associations, and institutions of shared caring for each other and ideals. For example, a child gradually learns with her parents and carers how to reflect on her selfish impulses and behave “fairly”³⁶; eventually she may attend university, and learn with her co-students and teachers how to practice law “ethically,” “legally,” and “justly.” The important point for us is that know-how not only involves a system of dispositional beliefs, but also emotional attunement to ideals that coordinate that system's application.

The second aspect I want to emphasize is that this system is extended and situated beyond the mind. We have just heard that individual know-how depends on external structures like relationships and institutions in order to be internalized as psychological structures. I also hinted earlier that hands are not merely executors of

³⁴ The incorporeal content of these thoughts is grounded in dispositions of the bodily psyche with varying levels of pneumatic tension (LONG and SEDLEY, *op. cit.*, §33A-F, 41H4, 61C5), but this materialism has little effect on Stoic moral psychology.

³⁵ Compare M. SOLM's outstanding article: The Conscious Id, *Neuropsychanalysis*, 15.1, 2013, pp. 5-19.

³⁶ Cf. *DID*, pp. 116-19; *WML*, pp. 1-5, 65-70; *TCY*, pp. 1-6.

the mind's decisions. While we often speak of "the hand" metonymically to designate the subject's agency (as do Latin authors³⁷), in many situations hands move with a restless semi-autonomy. Occupying and integrating the hands' energy is an important psychodevelopmental task for infants; pathologies such as "alien hand" and "anarchic hand" syndromes show how this integration can fail³⁸. For Stiegler, the primary vector of integration is tool use. In fact, he maintains that "hands" are only constituted as such (as vectors of the subject's agency) by their intelligent and emotionally attuned manipulation of objects³⁹.

These objects and the technologies encompassing them are also parts of our extended systems of thinking and feeling. They materialize and externalize cultural know-how, and in this way mediate individuals' and groups' attention and care for ideals. They have their own dynamism, because their techno-material properties afford novel and unforeseen "circuits" for the bodies, thoughts, and feelings of individuals and groups: new enjoyments and motivations emerge, while old ones are changed. This disrupts existing circuits of caring and paying attention, necessitating critical reflection and creative experimentation in order to maintain "metastability"⁴⁰. Where reflection and creativity are lacking, this can "short-circuit" attention and care.

Imagine, for instance, that our aforementioned legal student brings a laptop to lecture. The laptop then mediates how she learns in that lecture. Yet the properties of the laptop sponsor dynamisms of their own. Since the laptop and associated web technologies enable remote learning, she may decide there is no need to attend

³⁷ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, s.v. *manus*, esp. def. 1B3, 1B4.

³⁸ D. LEADER, *Hands: What We Do with Them – and Why*, London, Penguin, 2016, esp. 1-27, 77-89.

³⁹ *TT*, pp. 113-14, 243-5; *DID*, pp. 131-62.

⁴⁰ Stiegler follows Simondon (*op. cit.*) in speaking of "metastability" as the dynamic condition of a self-organizing system that progresses toward a unity it will never complete.

lecture. Remote learning triggers a cascade of changes in the relationships and habits of teaching and learning for professors and students, which both parallel and prepare the ground for changes in courtroom technology – with unpredictable consequences for how the next generation idealizes and cares for legality, ethics, and justice by caring for their co-professionals and clients⁴¹. The key takeaway for us is that “thought is not a faculty of the intellect localized in the brain any more than in the heart or liver: it is the product of social organization and works properly, when it does, through [techno-material] apparatuses.⁴²” In other words, the circuitry of know-how runs not only through the brain, but also through the body (especially the hands) and through artefacts. For this reason, psychopathology – in Seneca’s terms, problems of virtue and sanity – must take into account both the body and technology; it is not “all in the head.”

This brings me to the third and final aspect I want to highlight, which is what Stiegler calls the problem of “spirit.”⁴³ “Spirit” designates all those ideals and idealities toward which knowing and caring are oriented, facilitating the integration of circuits that run across psyches and bodies, relationships and institutions, and technologies and artefacts. They are metaphysically real; they may not “exist,” but it is through their “consistency” that social reality emerges. For instance, “the honeybee,” “the French language,” and “justice” are all spirits⁴⁴. Let us focus on the last of these. The “spirit of justice” orients and integrates the bodily, psychological, socio-institutional, and technomaterial circuitry of legal learning and procedures.

Ideals are “infinite,” meaning they are the inexhaustible “singularities” toward which

⁴¹ See recently J. DONOGHUE, *The Rise of Digital Justice: Courtroom Technology, Public Participation and Access to Justice*, *Modern Law Review*, 18.6, 995-1025.

⁴² *TCY*, p. 167.

⁴³ *AO*, pp. 31-2; *TCY*, pp. 33, 43, 49-53; *TT*, pp. 118-21; *WML*, pp. 9-26, 59-78.

⁴⁴ *AO*, p. 5-7, 32; *DID*, pp. 89-93, 116-19, 124-27; *RE*, p. 10; *TCY*, p. 41-6, 68-71, 100-6; *WML*, pp. 32-4, 43-8.

our individual forethought, corporate organization, and technical infrastructure endlessly project themselves. Both the theorization and the application of justice are interminable⁴⁵. Metastable systems require these infinities, because it is by progressing toward this horizon that they maintain identity in the midst of change. For example, in Stiegler's post-psychoanalytic terminology, the psyche maintains its identity through its (caring, attentive, and socialized) desire for inexhaustible sublimations like justice. In this way it avoids both the compulsion of unsublimated drives, which undermine its identification as an "I," and repressive blockage, which stifles its self-projection toward its future⁴⁶. That is why justice is a spirit, and its cultivation a kind of "mystagogy"⁴⁷.

A healthy spiritual ecosystem tends to support people's "serenity, their trust in life, their feeling that life is worth living, their autonomy."⁴⁸ We can think of this is the extended-and-situated version of religious "faith." It is a necessary component of the know-how we are calling virtue and sanity. On the other hand, an unhealthy ecosystem undermines trust, satisfaction, and the feeling of autonomy. Stiegler calls the system's capacity to nourish these affective dispositions "the fidelity of the milieu"⁴⁹. He asserts that in philosophical henotheism, as in Christian monotheism, "God" underpinned the ecosystem's fidelity⁵⁰. What secular modernity needs is not a return to god – Stiegler repudiates nostalgia – but a new spiritual ecology, which will critically examine problems in our rapidly evolving socio-political and technological systems and coordinate their orientation to shared caring for ideals. Where

⁴⁵ Esp. *DID*, pp. 36-93.

⁴⁶ See esp. *LSC*, pp. 42-92; *WML*, passim; T. ESPINOZA, *The Technical Object of Psychoanalysis*, *Stiegler and Technics*, C. HOWELLS and G. MOORE (eds.), Edinburgh, 2013, pp.151-64.

⁴⁷ *TCY*, pp. 36-53, with my comments, *From Metaphysics to Ethics*, pp. 325-6.

⁴⁸ *WML*, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *WML*, esp. pp. 34-5, 59-64, 76-8.

⁵⁰ *DID*, pp. 61-74, 85-90, 125, 137; *LSC*, pp. 76-7; *WML*, pp. 59-78.

human beings cannot articulate, satisfy, and renew their desire by caring for these inexhaustible shared ideals, they suffer “frustrations, narcissistic wounds, and melancholy⁵¹,” culminating in “fury”: “To lose the feeling that life is worth living may drive one to furious madness⁵².” Then there is the risk that spirit will coalesce in hostile forms, whether scattered across behavioral habits and technologies as “demonic” addictions, or concentrated in reactionary fundamentalisms⁵³.

Stiegler believes that “spiritual misery reigns” today, because we devote far too little critical attention to the ecology of spirit. One solution he never contemplates is a new form of religiosity, which embraces and incorporates psychological and ethico-political critiques of traditional religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. He appears to be unacquainted not only with post-dogmatic religious philosophy⁵⁴, but also with the flourishing field on psychiatry and spirituality⁵⁵. This is regrettable, since he deploys religious terminology with such enthusiasm. Moreover, he never considers how polytheistic ecosystems could differ from henotheistic ones. Since the world of *Hercules* is structured by multiple divine spirits, Seneca’s text can help us to push Stiegler on this point. If we are to think about Hercules’ sanity, or to think with *Hercules* about our own sanity, then we must leave some space for the gods.

IIC. Insanity and the Gods Revisited

⁵¹ *WML*, p. 15; cf. *TT*, pp. 123, 203.

⁵² *WML*, p. 4; cf. *DID*, p. 106; *TCY*, p. 86. Cf. A. POWELL and C. MACKENNA, Psychotherapy, *Spirituality and Psychiatry*, A. SIMS, C. H. COOK, A. POWELL (eds.), London: Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2009, p. 111: “loss of meaning leads to loss of control, for when we cease to understand our experience we lose the ability to take meaningful action in relation to it.”

⁵³ *DID*, p. 89, 98; *WML*, p. 31, 109.

⁵⁴ Two landmarks: R. KEARNEY, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*, New York, Columbia, 2011; J. KRIPAL, *The Secret Body: Erotic and Esoteric Currents in the History of Religion*, Chicago, 2018.

⁵⁵ See n.51 and the Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/specialinterestgroups/spirituality.aspx>, accessed 03.07.2018.

Our primary task throughout this article has been to understand Hercules' insanity and his relation to the gods. We are now ready to complement the explanation we offered in Part I.

Let us look again at the run-up to Hercules' delirium. Recall that he only comes on stage once in the first three quarters of the play, when he returns from Hades, learns about the threat to his family, and immediately dashes off again:

Let the victim be slaughtered, and let my virtue bear this stain! ... I'm carried off to drink my enemy's blood. Stay here, Theseus, lest some sudden force approach. Battle calls me. Defer your embraces, father, defer, my wife! (634-9)

I have already commented on this scene from a Stoic perspective, arguing that it implies a preconception of virtue revolving around manliness, bodily and mental vigor, actions accomplished with that vigor, and honor won by those actions. Stoics would say that these preconceptions predispose Hercules to anger.

The benefit of introducing a Stieglerian perspective is that it takes us outside Hercules' head and into an ecosystem, of which individuals' passions are only one component. With regard to the foregoing passage, we will first say that Hercules participates in the spirit of heroic virtue. We will then explain that by "spirit" we mean a complex ideal, which contains and nourishes the currents of attention and care among the characters in this scene. In other words, Hercules cares for his father and wife by caring for bellicosity (*me bella poscunt*), and asks his friend Theseus to care for him in the same way. Passages from earlier in the play suggest that his loved ones have often solicited precisely this kind of care (275-7, 421-37, 640-4, 645-827). Spirits of intimacy and affection hover in the wings of this scene, but fail to capture attention or shape interpersonal care (*differ amplexus, parens, coniunxque differ*)⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Cf. Michaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-3; Fitch, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-8.

Additional elements of this system become apparent when Hercules returns three hundred verses later. His entering words are “By this avenging right hand Lycus fell and bit the dust Now I’ll make victory offerings to my father and the gods above, and worship at the worthy altars with slain victims” (898-9). After invoking Pallas, Dionysus, Phoebus, and Diana, he reiterates that “my hand will honor the Thunderer” (900-14). Notice how the cultivation of ideals becomes continuous with cultivation of Olympian gods: thinking, feeling, and acting in the “spirit” of manly valor colors Hercules’ worship of “spiritual” beings, and vice versa. Moreover, both depend on a technomaterial apparatus: Hercules calls for the altars to be loaded with produce and spices, himself and Theseus to be wreathed with garlands, and incense to be thrown in the fire (908-18). This apparatus shapes what counts as worshipping the gods, which in turn influences the ideals connected to the gods and the caring relationships oriented toward those ideals.

The capstone of this ritual technology is the pouring of libations and burning of “slain victims.” Here a disagreement breaks out:

Amphitryon: Son, your hands are dripping with the blood of your enemies’ murder. First purify them.

Hercules: If only I could pour as a libation the gore from that hated head! No sweeter liquid would ever have moistened the altars. Surely no fatter or richer victim can be slaughtered for Jove than an unjust king! (918-24)

Superficially this is a conflict between two lines of practical reasoning. Amphitryon, believing that it is forbidden for anyone who has shed human blood to approach the gods, reasons that Hercules should purify his hands (*manus ... expia*). Hercules, believing that his killings are divinely sanctioned, reasons that they constitute the highest form of sacrifice: “Surely no fatter or richer victim can be slaughtered for Jove than an unjust king!” Fitch comments that Hercules’ thinking displays a

“hubristic disregard of religious proprieties,” which is true⁵⁷. But analysis of Hercules’ “hubris,” “vainglory,” and “ambition”⁵⁸ remains bounded by his psychology; in order to illuminate why he becomes delirious, we need to adopt a more extended perspective.

It is worth spelling out in some detail the extended circuits of care and attention that intersect in this ritual. First, it is oriented toward Jupiter as the primary spiritual guarantor of the network. Second it is oriented toward a bellicose ideal of virtue, since it celebrates Hercules’ killing of an “unjust king.” Third, it organizes reciprocal caring in personal relationships, beginning with Hercules’ relation to Jupiter as his divine father: Hercules cares for Jupiter by “pacifying” the world (875-92), and Jupiter is supposed to care for Hercules by elevating him to heaven (23, 959). The ritual also organizes the reciprocal caring among Hercules, his wife and children, Amphitryon, and Theseus: all are “concerned” in the victory they are celebrating, as victor (Hercules), assistant (Theseus), and beneficiaries (Amphitryon, Megara, the children). Fourth, it organizes a network of objects and techniques, namely the offering of fruits and spices, burning of incense, pouring of libations, slaying of the victims, and articulation of prayers. Fifth, it governs the energies of the body, here emblemized by the “victorious right hand” that slew Lycus, “my hand” that will worship the Thunderer, and “your hands” that are dripping with blood. These interlocking circuits allow the world of objects, people, actions, relationships, ideals and spirits to make practical and emotional sense. In other words, they encapsulate in this moment the ecosystem of affordances for thinking, feeling, and acting. Thus they contain and stabilize the fidelity of the milieu.

⁵⁷ FITCH, *op. cit.*, p. 26. This owes more to Greek than Roman religious norms. See R. PARKER, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1983, pp. 104-43.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

This is why Amphytryon's suggestion triggers a loss of reality for Hercules. Though he outwardly dismisses the criticism in a peremptory fashion, inwardly it stirs up a premonition that the whole network spun around this ritual is dysfunctional – in other words, that organizing his care and attention in this way will not make life worth living. If that were so, he would no longer know what kind of person to be, how to relate to other people and gods, how to inhabit his body, or what objects were for.

That is not all. Let us recall that he and Amphytryon believe that Juno has persecuted him throughout his life (213-4, 447, 614-5, 908, 1018, 1201, 1297). Two points should be made here. First, this makes Juno metaphysically real; in other words, her consistency as a hostile and ubiquitous presence sustains and organizes people's attention and care. It allows Hercules' body, relationships, weapons, actions, and ideals to be what they are in social reality.

Second, the social reality disclosed by Juno's consistency tends toward instability. It is entirely possible for hateful spirits to be part of a faithful milieu. But when they predominate, they orient the system toward destroying enemies and amplifying fragile selves. These selves are fragile because they are not distributed across complex, resilient networks of care⁵⁹. Amphytryon, Megara, and Hercules all struggle to counterbalance Juno's predominance through faith in benevolent gods (205-74, 295-308, 516-19, 900-18). But Hercules' moment of doubt temporarily disconnects him from those circuits, leaving nothing to hold him and his world together except self-aggrandizement and aggression. That is why he hallucinates enemies everywhere: in the stars (944-52), in his own children and wife (988-1024), in fantasies about destroying Mycenae (994-1001), and in Jupiter's celestial kingdom

⁵⁹ See n. 46 on Stiegler's relation to psychoanalysis, with M. KLEIN, *Envy and Gratitude*, London, Vintage, 1997, esp. pp. 1-24; C. BOLLAS, *Loving Hate*, *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, 12, 1984, pp. 221-37.

(960-73). That is also why vanquishing these imaginary enemies inflates his ego: “I should be exalted to the transcendent spaces of the world! Onward, to the aether” (958-9)! Significantly, all of this is addressed to Juno: “I have slain this flock for you, wife of greatest Jove” (1036-7). In other words, it is because Juno has displaced benevolent gods that a complex ritual ecology has collapsed into the repetitive circuitry of paranoid megalomania.

This explanation of how and why Hercules becomes delirious enriches rather than replaces the reading in Part I. It adds embodied, psychodynamic, spiritual, and materially and socially extended dimensions to the Stoics’ cognitivist and individualist approach. We need both in order to understand this text – or indeed our real lives.

IId. Technology, Theology, and Responsibility

I have now completed the primary tasks set for this article. By way of conclusion, I want to comment briefly on its dénouement, returning in particular to the question of responsibility. We have seen that Stoic moral psychology struggles to make sense of Juno’s dramatic prominence. Stiegler’s approach accommodates Juno better, but where does that leave responsibility? The answer is complicated, but truer to both fiction and reality. For Stiegler, the individual’s capacity to take responsibility, find meaning in their actions, and deliberate about the future is relative to the ecosystem⁶⁰. What we witness in the final act is Hercules’ attempt to rediscover agency and responsibility in the wake of disaster. As is common with tragedy, his immense guilt and suffering amplify a problem we all experience, though usually in quieter ways: autonomy exists only within heteronomy, so we must look beyond our brains and bodies in order to maintain and renew it.

⁶⁰ *AO*, 19-22; *TT*, 230, 260; *WML*, 2-3, 20-21, 40-41, 110-1.

I will restrict my comments to two curious features of the final act. The first is its emphasis on Hercules' weapons. I have already quoted how Hercules' hands grope for his club even in his slumber (1086-7). As he sleeps, the chorus apostrophizes his arms:

Strong arrows, that hung so long
to decorate his neck,
and heavy quiver,
blast down blows on his untamed back!
Let the oak beat his strong shoulders,
and the stout club
load up his torso with its cruel knots.
May all his weapons lament such extraordinary grievances. (1115-21)

Stiegler helps us to make philosophical sense of the chorus' poetic personification here. They call on the weapons to express grief (*plangent tantos arma dolores*, 1121), exact penance (*date saeva fero verbera tergo; caedant umeros robora fortes stipesque potens duris oneret pectora nodis*, 1117-20), and atone (*dent arma poenas*, 1235). We can explain this by recalling that, like the laptop in IIb, the weapons' aesthetic and material properties sponsor certain modes of caring about Hercules' body, skills, loved ones, and ideals. Since they are always with him, these modes of caring have come to define him; in this way the weapons are parts of him, as his hand's "vain activity" attests (1086). Thus the chorus' personification acknowledges the weapons' complicity in his guilt. It is worth belaboring this point: the weapons are more than *symbols* of his lack of health and virtue; they are also *components* of this insanity.

That is why, when Hercules awakens, his weapons are immediately enrolled in his effort to make sense of what has happened:

Give this boy my bow,
this one my arrows, this one my mighty club.
For you I will break my weapons. Child, for you
I will break my bow. For your ghost my heavy club
will burn. On your pyre I will lay
my quiver full of Lernaean weapons.
My arms must be punished! And I will burn you too,

stepmotherly hands, which brought disaster on my weapons. (1229-36)

Notice how Hercules names each weapon twice over: “my bow” (*arcum*), “my arrows” (*sagittas*), “my mighty club” (*stipitem vastum*); “my bow” (*arcus*), “my heavy club” (*stipes gravis*) “this quiver full of Lernaean weapons” (*ipsa Lernaeis frequens pharetra telis*). It is through them that he struggles to find a way to care about his body, his loved ones, and his ideals. Burning his famous arms and his weapon-bearing hands is a way of repudiating the heroic value system. Since he sees his hands as “stepmotherly” (*novercales*), this immolation is directed against the entire network held together by Juno’s spiritual consistency. At the same time, it is also a way of caring for his murdered children: “For you”; “Child, for you”; “for your ghost” Again, it is worth belaboring this point: immolation would obviously be a *symbolic* act, but it would also *actually* interrupt the circuitry that individuates Hercules as the unwise, unhealthy, unvirtuous person he currently is.

However, Hercules does not follow through with this immolation. Instead he falls back on self-sacrifice: “Quickly I’ll cleanse the earth: for too long I’ve watched the wanderings of an ungodly, savage, inexorable and wild monster. Come, strong hand, undertake this immense labor...” (1279-82). Unlike burning his weapons, turning them against himself would allow him to retain most of his existing orientations. In this way he would avoid the laborious construction of new ways of paying attention and taking care. But Amphitryon’s entreaties block this escape route, and Amphitryon’s fragile hand and body, needing support and consolation, displace the weapons from Hercules’ hands (1319-21). From a Stoic perspective, as I commented in section I, this could help Hercules to begin questioning his incorrect beliefs about virtue. From a Stieglerian perspective, removing the weapons and accepting intimate contact already changes Hercules cognitive-emotional

environment. If this were sustained, it could eventually change his positions in the ecosystem, which would predispose his beliefs toward change.

This brings me to the second enigma in the final act, which concerns Theseus' portentous closing words:

My land awaits you.
There Gradivus purged his hands of murder
and reunited them with his weapons. That land calls you, Alcides.
It is practiced in rendering the gods innocent.

Why does Theseus allude to the trial of Gradivus – i.e. Ares – for killing Halirrhothius, the son of Poseidon (Paus. 1.21.4, Apoll. 3.14.2, Serv. *Georg.* 1.18)? Before answering, we should note that he thereby alludes to the trial of Orestes as well, in which the matricide was prosecuted by the Erinyes, defended by Apollo, and acquitted by Athena's tie-breaking vote (Aesch. *Eum.*). Greek authors often name these two trials in the same breath (Eur. *El.* 1258-64; Dem. 33.66, Din. 1.87), because they represent the twin etiology for the founding of the Areopagus homicide court. The Areopagus was reputed to be the finest seat of Athenian procedural justice⁶¹. So why does Theseus call Hercules to an exemplary juridical procedure, in the legendary birthplace of humane civilization, at a topographically significant location (atop a rocky outcropping, beneath the temples and above the agora), following precedents with extensive divine involvement?

The concise answer is that geography, topography, procedure, precedents, and associated ideals all facilitate the pathways of care and attention Hercules needs. He could not escape his despair simply by studying and applying better ethical principles, because he lacks the habits of caring and paying attention that would make that study effective (or perhaps even possible). Just as Amphytrion's feeble body affects

⁶¹ A. LANNI, *Law and Justice in the Courts of Classical Athens*, Cambridge, 2006, 78-9.

Hercules differently than his words, so the Areopagus may function as an extended scaffold and container for psychological experience. Part of that experience will be forging new relationships with gods. Though Juno in particular has been a pathogenetic force in Hercules' life, the solution suggested by Theseus is not to give up Hercules' yearning for heaven. In ways that Stiegler ignores and Seneca only hints at, a world of many gods coordinated with many skills, materials, relationships, groups and ideals also provides many possibilities for self-cultivation and therapy⁶². It is by dramatizing this capacious vision of sanity, virtue, and spirituality that Seneca's *Hercules* supports our critical reflection on both Stoic and Stieglerian theories.

⁶² The starting point for exploring this issue would be to create a dialogue between J. HILLMAN's post-Jungian return to Greece in *Revision-ing Psychology*, London, Harper, 1975, and the structuralist synthesis of V. PIRENNE DELFORGE and G. PIRONTI, Many into One, *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*, E. EIDINOW and J. KINDT (eds.), Oxford, 2015, 39-47.